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Defense Secretary Calls for Reform of Export Controls

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates is calling for an overhaul of the nation's defense export system that more closely matches 21st-century security needs and economic interests.

In a recent speech to military contractors, Gates said the current system of export controls is more likely to undermine the nation's defense than protect it. He proposed four key reforms: a single export control list, a single licensing agency, a single enforcement coordination agency and a single information technology system.

The export control system puts limits on the export of some security-related products and technologies.

"America's decades-old, bureaucratically labyrinthine system does not serve our 21st-century security needs or our economic interests," Gates said April 20 in Washington. "It is clear our current limitations in this area undermine our ability to work with and through partners to confront shared threats and challenges, from terrorism to rogue states to rising powers."

"Our security interests would be far better served by a more agile, transparent, predictable and efficient regime," he said. "The United States is thought to have one of the most stringent export regimes in the world, but stringent is not the same as effective."

A study done for the National Association of Manufacturers estimates that modernizing defense export controls has the potential to expand U.S. economic output by at least \$64 billion and create an additional 160,000 manufacturing jobs — both vital to an economy recovering from one of the steepest recessions since the Great Depression of the 1930s. One component of President Obama's call for balanced economic growth includes less reliance on a consumer-driven economy and more on exports of goods and services.

House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman said recently that he supports more effective controls to address the new security threats, but the controls must also preserve U.S. technological and scientific leadership. "I am preparing legislation to revise, modernize and strengthen our dual-use control system and am closely consulting with the president's senior advisers," he said. "I expect to have legislation ready for committee and House action shortly."

The current export system was designed for the Cold War

more than 50 years ago and has not been revised since the end of it during the 1990s. It was designed to prevent adversaries from gaining access to military technology and equipment that could be used against the United States.

"The current arrangement fails at the critical task of preventing harmful exports while facilitating useful ones," Gates said.

Dual-use technology includes items that can be used for military or civilian purposes. This can include global positioning devices and even laptop computers, both of which were designed for military use but were later developed for civilian use.

Bosnia-Herzegovina Offered Plan for NATO Membership

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Members of NATO have agreed to grant Bosnia-Herzegovina's request for a membership action plan (MAP), which could pave the way for its entry into the alliance, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says.

Speaking to reporters April 23 in Tallinn, Estonia, after two days of meetings by NATO foreign ministers, Clinton reaffirmed the continued U.S. support for NATO enlargement, pointing to the "experience and contributions" of host-country Estonia as an example that "NATO's open door strengthens our alliance and advances our shared goals."

The secretary said the decision on Bosnia-Herzegovina was made "with the expectation it will serve as a catalyst for important reforms that will help strengthen Bosnian institutions and allow it to function more effectively as a state."

Bosnia-Herzegovina will "have to take certain steps in order to proceed in the MAP process," Clinton said.

At an April 23 press conference, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen welcomed the decision as reflecting a collective alliance view that "the place of Bosnia-Herzegovina should be in the Euro-Atlantic structures, NATO and the EU."

The MAP process, which can take several years, involves several stages of political dialogue with the candidate country, as well as the reform of its military to bring it in line with NATO standards, before full membership can be granted.

According to an April 22 NATO statement, Bosnia-Herzegovina has made "significant progress on reform," with NATO foreign ministers welcoming the country's destruction of surplus ammunition and arms stocks, as well as its additional contributions to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

Rasmussen said the implementation of the MAP will begin "when some clearly identified defense property is formally transferred from the entity level to the Ministry of Defense," reflecting the requirement that all military equipment inside Bosnia-Herzegovina must be registered as belonging to the government.

"I hope that that step will be taken by the authorities in Bosnia-Herzegovina as soon as possible," Rasmussen said.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, formerly part of the Yugoslav Federation, applied to NATO for a MAP in 2009. During the past year, Croatia was granted full membership in the alliance, and Montenegro was also given a MAP.

AFGHAN GOVERNMENT TAKING OVER SECURITY RESPONSIBILITY

Foreign ministers from NATO and ISAF countries also agreed on a common approach to enable the Afghan government to progressively exercise sovereignty over its country in security, governance and development, with international forces providing continued support.

"I expect that we will start handing over responsibility to the Afghans this year," Rasmussen said. The transition plan sets the conditions to be met, as well as what NATO and ISAF "will do to make those conditions happen."

"Where it occurs, transition must be not just sustainable, but irreversible," he said.

Clinton said that "with sufficient attention, training and mentoring, the Afghans themselves are perfectly capable of defending themselves against insurgents."

She acknowledged that with the continued threats of terrorism and suicide bombers, Afghanistan will face threats to its peace and security "for years to come."

But she pointed to the example of Iraq, whose military "is certainly proving itself to be a capable force."

"I don't think we should expect the Afghans to meet an impossible standard. But what we can expect and what we are working toward achieving is an Afghan national security force, military and police, that is able to protect the people and create a sense of confidence in their capacity," she said.

U.S. MAINTAINING NUCLEAR ARSENAL TO DEFEND NATO

The secretary also said that while the United States is taking "concrete steps" to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons and weapons proliferation, it will maintain "a safe, secure and effective arsenal" to deter any adversary for "as long as nuclear weapons exist."

"We will continue to guarantee the security of our NATO allies," Clinton said. "That's a commitment enshrined in NATO's Article 5 and a bedrock principle of American foreign policy."

In an April 23 statement, NATO said the alliance is "firmly committed to maintaining the security of its members, but at the lowest possible level of nuclear weapons."

The organization must continue to maintain "a balance between credible deterrence and support for arms control disarmament and nonproliferation," the statement said, adding that its missile defense plans "while not replacing deterrence, can complement it."

U.S. Envoy Tries to Restart Mideast Peace Process

By Luis Ramirez
VOA News

Jerusalem — U.S. special envoy George Mitchell is back in the Middle East, trying to get the Israeli-Palestinian peace process moving again. Mitchell met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on April 23, a day after the Israeli leader said Israel would continue its controversial policy of building Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem. Part of the job ahead for the U.S. envoy is helping repair damaged relations between Washington and Israel.

Israeli officials gave no details of the discussions between the U.S. envoy and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying only that talks went well. In remarks going into the meeting, the Israeli leader told U.S. special envoy George Mitchell his government is serious about moving the peace process forward.

"I look forward to working with you and with President Obama to advance peace. We're serious about it. We know you're serious about it," he said.

However, with Israel continuing to reject Washington's calls for an end to settlement construction, there were few signs of a breakthrough that would mend relations between the two allies.

Ties have been frayed as the Obama administration pressures Israel to stop or restrict settlement construction

on lands that are claimed by the Palestinians.

Analysts say the U.S. and Israel's approaches to the conflict have long differed. Israel has had a long-standing policy of settling the occupied territories. The United States has for years opposed this practice, considering it unhelpful to the peace process.

"This is a tension or difference or a gap in approaches that has been boiling for several years but was conveniently suppressed because there was a peace process or even the appearance of a peace process," said Alon Pinkas, a foreign affairs analyst at the Yitzhak Rabin Center in Tel Aviv and a former consul general to New York. "In the last year, there has not been a peace process [and] it all surfaced and erupted."

Israel has given no signs of bowing to Washington's key demands on settlement construction.

On April 22, as Mitchell arrived here, Netanyahu told Israeli television Israel will continue settling East Jerusalem.

He said there will not be a building freeze in Jerusalem. Netanyahu said Israel's policy on Jerusalem will not change, and it has been, he said, the policy of all his predecessors since the 1967 war.

It was in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war that Israel captured East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordanian control.

The Palestinians claim the eastern part of Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. They say they will not restart negotiations until Israel stops all settlement activity. Israel wants the Palestinians to return to talks without preconditions.

With the peace process stalled for more than a year, observers see fatigue setting in among all those involved, including the United States.

Pinkas says the only way to avoid a deepening of the conflict is for both Israelis and Palestinians to take difficult but meaningful steps toward finding a real solution.

"A modus vivendi will be found in terms of a working relationship, but that would be on borrowed time because at some point, everyone is going to see that the process is not producing the desired goals and desired results and it's all going to explode. By explode, I mean politically," he said.

Some Israeli officials on April 23 said that they were hopeful a deal would be reached soon for both sides to begin indirect negotiations.

Mitchell is due to meet with Palestinian officials before seeing Netanyahu again on Sunday.

Hopes Rise for Asia-Pacific Trade Liberalization

U.S., Japan coordinate consecutive summits

By Kathryn McConnell
Staff Writer

Washington — Japan, the host of the 2010 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, and the United States, the APEC summit host for 2011, support similar agendas, raising hopes for an increase in regional trade, which has stagnated during the past decade, according to a senior U.S. trade official.

Japan and the United States, staunch allies and high-volume trading partners since the end of World War II, are coordinating their views on investment, small business development, women's issues and food safety at the consecutive summits, according to U.S. officials.

As APEC's 2010 host, Japan is focusing on liberalizing regional policies to facilitate cross-border investment, said Wendy Cutler, assistant U.S. trade representative for APEC affairs. The following year the United States will focus on making cross-border trading of goods and services "cheaper, easier and faster" and promote environmentally friendly growth and efficient supply chains, she said April 16 in Washington.

The State Department's senior official for APEC, Kurt Tong, said the United States will use the summit in Japan to emphasize small and medium enterprise development, worker retraining and job creation. Small enterprises account for 95 percent of businesses in the Asia-Pacific region, he said.

At the 2010 summit, the United States and Japan will co-sponsor ministerial meetings on food safety, as well as on women's entrepreneurship to highlight the role that women play in economic growth and job creation.

The two allies also will try to advance the Trans-Pacific Partnership group, which has grown from an initial four to seven economies on both sides of the Pacific, Cutler said.

President Obama announced U.S. support of a Trans-Pacific Partnership trading zone in December 2009. The group currently includes Australia, Brunei, Chile, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership creates the opportunity to "set the standard for 21st-century trade agreements," U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk said in February.

Partnership supporters say that to be most effective, the group needs the participation of at least half of the 21 economies in the Asia-Pacific region. Malaysia and South Korea have expressed interest in joining, but South Korea's parliament has blocked ratification of a free-trade agreement with the United States.

The Asia-Pacific region is the most dynamic economic region in the world and accounts for more than half of global output. Since APEC was founded in 1989, trade among its members has grown 395 percent, according to Walter Mondale, a former U.S. vice president and a former ambassador to Japan.

Cutler said the trans-Pacific trade landscape has changed dramatically since 1994, when APEC adopted a set of trade liberalization goals known as the Bogor Goals. The goals call for free trade among APEC's developed member economies by 2010 and among all members by 2020.

When the Bogor Goals were set, just five economies said they would be ready for an APEC trade liberalization and investment review by 2010. Now, more and more countries are volunteering to be reviewed, stating that they have achieved significant growth and progress in liberalizing trade and investment policies, Cutler said.

In 1994, APEC members faced a narrower range of trade issues than they face today. For instance, the group had just started to consider issues such as services and intellectual property rights. Today's issues include competition policy, transparency and electronic commerce, among others, she said.

Haitian Relief Workers Prepare for Rainy Season

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Today, the remaining U.S. military forces in Haiti are working feverishly to help Haitians dislocated by the devastating January 12 earthquake to prepare for the coming rainy season, says the former commander of American forces there.

"We've focused recently on moving those populations, working with ... nongovernment organizations, the U.N. and others on getting them out of harm's way because many of them are in low-lying areas," said Army Lieutenant General Ken Keen, deputy commander of U.S. Southern Command and commander of Joint Task Force Haiti until recently.

"That is well under way. We've mitigated the effects of the potential rains on ... camps that are in the most vulnerable areas, and actually have moved over 2,000

displaced persons out of some of these camps that were at high risk into other settlements that have been established by the international community," Keen said.

There are about 2,200 U.S. military personnel, four military aircraft and some Army landing craft in Haiti. The U.S. military presence will be reduced to about 500 personnel by June 1.

Keen recently turned over duties as the U.S. field commander in Haiti to Major General Sim Trombitas, who is the commander of U.S. Army South, the Army component of Southern Command. Keen was in Port-au-Prince at the time of the magnitude 7.0 earthquake and stayed on throughout the international relief effort, directing operations until civilian agencies could assume control.

"The current mission remains what it was when we got there ... saving lives and mitigating suffering," Keen said.

At the peak, around February 1, there were 22,000 U.S. military — from elements of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard — in Haiti or on naval ships nearby. The first American ship on the scene was from the U.S. Coast Guard. Keen said the military relief force eventually numbered 15 ships and 58 aircraft, which included the Navy's USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier and the hospital ship USNS Comfort.

Obviously, Keen said, the U.S. forces' priorities in support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which leads American assistance efforts, have changed over time. The problem today is preparing more than a million people for the coming rainy season who are displaced in and around Port-au-Prince and living in various conditions.

"I think there's a unique opportunity in Haiti today that did not exist before the earthquake," Keen said. "Clearly, the light of the world is shining on Haiti for the obvious needs. The world has responded significantly to avert a tremendous catastrophe."

"Clearly, while over 230,000 people died, many, many were saved, thousands were saved, because of the tremendous response medically, not just [by] our military and other militaries, but the international community [and] NGOs," Keen said at an April 19 Pentagon briefing.

U.N. MISSION IN HAITI

The head of the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), Edmond Mulet, recently requested an additional 800 police officers to provide safety in the refugee camps. The U.N. mission has revised the estimated number killed in the earthquake and its

aftermath to between 250,000 and 300,000 people; an exact figure may never be known.

The U.N. mission has a peacekeeping force of nearly 8,000 troops in Haiti, led by Brazilian Major General Floriano Peixoto, who recently turned over command to another Brazilian, Major General Paul Cruz.

Reducing the size of the military commitment in Haiti is practical, Keen said, because of the capability built up by civilian organizations that are running much of the humanitarian assistance efforts.

"They're being run and supported by NGOs under the United Nations Office of Humanitarian Coordination. So, as they build up that capacity and get into more of the recovery and reconstruction phase, the need for our military diminishes," Keen told reporters.

At a March donors conference at United Nations headquarters in New York, nearly 50 international donors pledged a total of \$9.9 billion in aid to help Haiti recover from the earthquake that devastated Port-au-Prince, the small island nation's capital city and financial center. In addition to those killed and injured in the earthquake, it is estimated that more than 1.3 million Haitians were left homeless.

Scientists Say Global Warming Affects Marine Life

By Zulima Palacio
VOA News

Narragansett, Rhode Island — In Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island, winter flounder no longer reproduce at the rate they used to. Nutrients that once supported a rich marine life are less abundant. And the water is warmer. It suffers from overfishing and shows signs of toxic chemicals banned 50 years ago. In short, say scientists at the University of Rhode Island, Narragansett Bay is typical of other coastal areas around the world.

Reinner Lohmann teaches a course in marine pollution at the University of Rhode Island. He studies organic pollutants in Narragansett Bay — specifically, the chemical contents in sediment where small organisms feed and are the start of the marine food chain. He has found hundreds of pollutants, including the pesticide DDT that was banned in the United States 40 years ago. "They may be stored in the sediments, but on a nice stormy day the sediments swell up and the compounds get released back into the water and can be taken back by fish," he explained.

Lohmann says every few years the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency checks on the contaminants in fish tissue. Based on that data, government scientists establish

safe eating guidelines for different fish.

The government fish advisories are based on the risk of cancer if you eat fish every day. Lohmann says humans can take 20 to 30 years to eliminate the toxics they consume when they eat contaminated fish. And long-term exposure to contaminants and the transfer of toxics from mother to child are major scientific concerns.

"We can detect these contaminants virtually everywhere," Lohmann said. "We have done studies in the Atlantic, the Arctic, in the Pacific — they are everywhere."

Other researchers at the University of Rhode Island are studying the effects of warming water temperatures.

"One degree, it seems like nothing. But if you think back to the last glacial maximum (when the glaciers were at their thickest and the sea levels at their lowest), the change in temperature from that time until now is only five degrees Celsius, or 10 degrees Fahrenheit," Candace Oviatt said. Oviatt has studied the bay for more than 40 years. "So one degree is huge, and we have seen huge changes on the bay as consequences of that."

Oviatt points to an 80 percent increase in rain storms. This April, large areas of Rhode Island were flooded, overwhelming several water treatment plants. Raw sewage, fertilizers and urban pollution ran freely into the bay.

"There is a lot of climate effects. One of the ones we experienced this week was this huge rain storm when we got eight inches [20.3 centimeters] of rain in three days," Oviatt said.

She adds that warmer temperatures in the bay and more rain water trigger a chain reaction of low oxygen and high levels of nutrients in the water, killing many organisms. "The winter flounder used to lay their eggs during the winter time because there are no predators, but if we heat up the bay waters, then those predators become active and they eat the eggs and the young juvenile winter flounder," she said.

Oviatt says overfishing and warmer waters have reduced the number of winter flounder by 75 percent. That's led to an end to commercial flounder fishing, and a two-fish limit on recreational anglers.

Yet despite the strains on Narragansett Bay, another University of Rhode Island researcher, Scott Nixon, says the bay is in better shape now than 50 years ago when metals, oils and waste often were thrown directly into the ocean. Now there are other concerns. "I think most coastal ecologists would probably say the most pervasive, chronic, widespread problem is nutrient pollution:

nitrogen and phosphorus pollution that comes from agricultures," he said.

Nixon said he hopes developing countries learn from our mistakes and stop polluting their coastal areas before more damage occurs.

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